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Soviet Twits Embattled Marines

Spokesman Gerasimov Says Ability 'to Withstand Blønd Spies' at Issue

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By Gary Lee
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 31—The chief Soviet foreign policy spokesman today made light of the withdrawal of the Marine guard contingent at the U.S. Embassy in the aftermath of a sex-related spy scandal, saying, "Recently we have witnessed a loss of capability to resist the enemy."

"We can only smile at what is said about this story," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov. "It is really funny that 28 staunch marines are brought back from the U.S. Embassy because they allegedly were unable to withstand the charms of blond spies."

The withdrawal of the Marine contingent, announced yesterday in Washington, coincides with the investigation of three marines formerly posted in Moscow who are suspected of having sexual affairs with Soviet women. Two have been accused of giving KGB agents access to the embassy.

Gerasimov struck a light-hearted, sarcastic tone about the situation.

"We are very surprised at the announcement of the withdrawal," he said, "signifying the defeat of the famous U.S. Marines who were victorious at Grenada," a reference to the U.S.-led invasion of the small Caribbean island in 1983.

"Sometimes we fear that there is a red under every bed," he added, smiling. "Now we see that we just have to change the beds."

"Of course, we regret that the stay of 28 U.S. marines in Moscow is discontinued so abruptly," Gerasimov said. "We are sorry for them."

The marines, who act as guards at the embassy, usually are assigned to up to two years of duty in Moscow, but the entire contingent is being transferred while the investigation proceeds, State Department officials in Washington said yesterday. The officials described it as a precautionary step.

Cpl. Arnold Bracy, whose arrest was announced a week ago, was said to have had an affair with a Soviet cook. Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree, who turned himself in last December, allegedly had an affair with an embassy translator.

Pentagon officials in Washington announced today that the second-ranking member of the embassy guard contingent, Staff Sgt. Robert Stanley Stufflebeam, is also under investigation but has not been charged.

Gerasimov was asked several times if Soviet agents had tried to recruit the marines. He did not answer.

Asked at first whether his references to resisting "the enemy" were an admission that the marines had been set up by Soviet spies, he said, "I was referring to the references in the western press that the enemy is using unordinary methods of disguise."